

Cat owners urged to make sure vaccinations are up to date

DOVER – Delaware cat owners are being advised to make certain that their pets' vaccinations are up to date to protect against disease after three cases of feline distemper, also called feline panleukopenia, were recently reported by a Dover-area veterinary clinic.

The three reported cases occurred in two six-month-old kittens and one adult cat. None of the cats were vaccinated against feline distemper and all had direct or indirect contact with unvaccinated outdoor cats. One cat died naturally and the other two were euthanized for humane reasons.

Feline distemper is a viral disease that causes weakness and fatigue, vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, low white blood cell counts, and even sudden death in cats. The virus is spread via the fecal-oral route and objects that have been contaminated by bodily excretions, typically food and water bowls, hands, clothing, and crates. The virus is highly contagious and very hardy in the environment unless inactivated by an appropriate disinfectant.

"We want cat owners to know that there is a vaccine for this deadly virus and it is highly effective in preventing disease," said Deputy State Veterinarian Dr. Karen Lopez. "The feline distemper vaccine is considered a core vaccine for cats and the vaccine series can be started in kittens as young as four weeks."

All domestic cats are susceptible to feline distemper, but unvaccinated cats living in groups, such as barn cats or feral cat colonies, are at greatest risk. Approximately 90 percent of infected kittens will die from the disease but vaccinated

adult cats have a low risk of becoming infected. The virus does not affect humans.

Cat owners should make sure their pets have been vaccinated for the disease, as well as other core vaccinations for rabies, feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, and feline leukemia virus. If owners suspect feline distemper or any other illness in their cats, they should contact their veterinarian immediately.

For more information about feline distemper and other animal health questions, contact the Delaware Department of Agriculture at (800) 282-8685 (Delaware only) or (302) 698-4500. Ask for the Poultry and Animal Health Section.

For information regarding stray, feral or free-roaming cats, visit the Division of Public Health Office of Animal Welfare (OAW) website

<http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/oaw/foundstraycats.html> or call (302) 255-4620. For cats and dogs, OAW is responsible for investigating animal cruelty, rabies vaccine enforcement, and the state's spay and neuter program. OAW staff also serve as a resource for individuals with questions regarding stray or feral cats.

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